Castlemaine Naturalist

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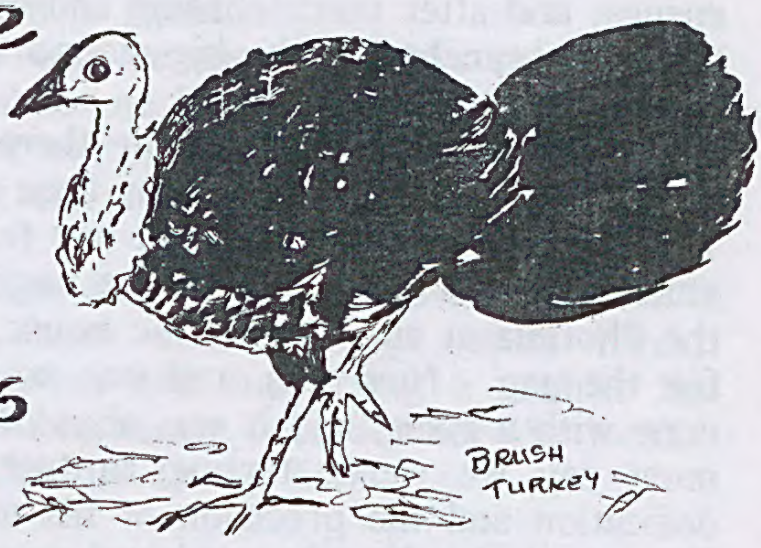

Scratch – a Bold and Busy Bird

It seems that many Brisbane gardens have their own resident Brush Turkey, and I was able to observe one at first hand recently when staying with our daughter Meg and her family.

Day 1. When I arrived, Scratch (as the family calls him) had been there for a day, beginning to refurbish an old mound which had been used two years ago. (In that time, it must be said, Meg had raided it for mulch for the more formal part of the garden!) He was enthusiastically scratching up all the leaf mould from beneath the palms, bamboo, mango, camphor laurel and other tropical greenery at the back of the block.

Day 2 The leaf litter has been formed up into a nice little mound which is actually on a lower level than the rest of the garden, down over a line of rocks which form a retaining wall for a bed of azaleas and ferns. There is just one clear area where access to the lower part of the garden is gained.

Day 3 am On rising we find that every skerrick of mulch and leaf litter which was covering the garden bed on the higher level has been scratched away from the bed and out onto the lawn, making quite a mess and causing a few mutterings from the gardener.

pm On our return from a couple of hours away, the lawn is once again in pristine condition, and every single bit of mulch has been removed through the opening, over the rocks and down onto the now very healthy looking nest.

Day 4 Much dedicated work at the building site – it is now about a metre high and 2 metres in diameter, and holds twigs, leaves, a water pistol, several pegs and a ball, and looking like a very desirable home in which to raise a family. Suddenly a loud commotion is heard, and on the lawn are two female turkeys, both showing considerable interest in

Scratch and his fascinating architectural offering. A nasty argument ensues, and after much chasing and squarking they both retire crossly to different branches of the big mango tree to watch developments.

Day 5 After a very wet night there has been no activity in the back garden, and a family outing has been planned for a good part of the day. This, of course, was just what our feathered friend needed, and we were stunned to find on our return a huge trail of leaves leading from under the Photinia at the side of the house, across the back lawn and heading for the gap. Now this trail was so neat that its sides could have been done with a ruler, and it was about 15 metres long and 1 metre wide! I must say we were starting to feel a measure of admiration for his dedication and the precision of his work - all achieved backwards, too! He was obviously exhausted and must have retired early, for there was no sign of him or the girls.

Kay 6 As Meg mentioned that she had really wanted the leaf litter in its original position, I decided to wait until she went for her ride after breakfast and then rake some of the leaves back to the Photinia bed, but it was not to be! By the time I sallied forth, Scratch had all but a couple of metres well down over the rocks and into the pile, so I made a token effort and raked back the remainder which was still on the lawn.

Day 7 am He is obviously not impressed with my actions and had disappeared through the wire fence to next door, where furious scratching is heard for hours, and leaves can be seen being thrown with gusto into the air as they come ever closer to our place.

pm After a short shopping trip we find yet another neat line of leaves from under the Photinia heading across the lawn - his greed for building material has got the better of him, and he must have thought it a pity to let me think I had won a round! One female is back in the tree keeping an eye on proceedings.

Day 8 My last day, and I must say it is quite disappointing to know I won't see the completion of this marathon. The mound is by now almost 3 metres in diameter and well over a metre high. The bird is still scratching away shaping it to his (and her?) liking.

2 weeks later A phone call reveals that there is now a neat track leading through the bush area to next door, where once it had been at least half a metre thick with vegetation, and the mound continues to grow.....

By the way, would you swap those blooming blackbirds for Scratch????

Phee Broadway

Wooli in the Yuraygir

- or Ten Days in Paradise!

On a recent visit to Coffs Harbour we spent ten days in the small coastal holiday resort of Wooli - about an hour's drive from Coffs and due east of Grafton - at the centre of the Yuraygir National Park, an absolute paradise for bird watchers and anglers.

Yuraygir covers 60km of coastline and 7300 hectares of land area in near natural condition, ranging from coastal range open forest, heathlands and swamps, to mangroves, and supporting a prolific and astonishing variety of bird life. 190 birds are recorded for the locality and visitors ar invited to submit additions to the list!

The little town is situated on a long narrow spit of land overlooking the Wooli river on one hand and superb ocean beaches on the other. On the river side are dense areas of banksias, casuarinas, meleleucas and mangroves populated by noisy hoards of lorikeets, Brush Wattlebirds, Blue-faced, Brown and White-cheeked Honeyeaters, Pied Butcherbirds, Spangled Drongos, and Southern Figbirds, to name just a few. The almost deafening dawn chorus, as heard from our flat, usually began with the melodious song of the butcherbirds.

Occasiojnally we spotted a solitary Jabiru feeding in the river shallows, along with pelicans, ibis and cormorants, while on the lush grassy areas along the edge there were numerous lapwings in residence.

Approaching the town, and perched high on a tall power pole is an Osprey nest in use by a pair of adult birds and shared at present with a single half-grown offspring. Osprey are sometimes electrocuted due to their preference for the power poles as nesting sites. As nests increase in height, and because of their huge wing span the birds run the risk of contact with two lines, and subsequent disaster. In order to avoid this the local electricity company, "North Power", have undertaken to make regular checks to control the height of the nest and remove a couple of layers of sticks prior to the breeding season when the birds usually add to the pile.

Each morning when the parent birds had gone off to patrol the river and coast, the young bird came to perch on a pole near our flat and make plaintive protests about having to fend to himself. "He'll be right as soon as the mullet run begins," said the locals. Anglers and birds were all waiting on "the mullet run", which is late this year.

The Osprey share the hunting with a pair of White-breasted Sea-eagles and a pair of Brahminy Kites which frequent the "coffee" cliffs site at the river mouth.

On the beach we saw the usual Silver Gulls, terns, gannets, Pied and Sooty Oyster-catchers, a large group of Red-capped Plovers and a Mangrove Heron.

The extensive heathland areas are patrolled by Wedgetailed Eagles, and are home to a great variety of birds from Emus to Southern Emu-wrens. Within a few kilometres of Wooli are the two picnic and camping areas of Minnie Waters and Diggers Camp, with excellent walking tracks through heathlands interspersed with banksias, angophoras, pandanus and paper barks. Families of Brown Quail dash across the tracks and Noisy and Little Friarbirds cackle loud and long. There are Common and Brush Bronzewings, cuckoo-shrikes, Double-barred Finches, Superb, Variagated and Red-backed Fairy-wrens, Peaceful and Diamond Doves in large groups, and once, at dusk, a Pheasant Coucal appeared at the edge of the road. There were so many species of birds to try to identify at once that it became over-whelming, and I'm not confident that I can do justice to Yuraygir.

One more highlight I must mention was the appearance of several Owlet-nightjars catching moths around a flood-light at the bowling green, and chirruping with excitement as they flew to and fro.

Wooli residents claim that their river is one of the last of the unpolluted rivers in NSW, and recommend the oysters from the small farm in the estuary, and after sampling the product ($7-50 per dozen, opened shells) we can guarantee they are sweet and succulent.

The rest of our visit was spent exploring the Dorrigo and Bellingen river areas from Coffs Hargour, where the Botanic Gardens are also of great interest, with recently added sections for the planting of endangered rain-forest trees.

Shirley Parnaby.

WATER
– the whole dam catastrophe

(Continued)

Streamside management is back in the news. Mount Alexander Shire Council held a summit and is now establishing a Streamside and Weeds Control Advisory Board to concentrate on a strategy to protect stream frontages. Nothing wrong in this; it's just that there have been numerous studies on the subject in the State without much result. The first I recall was a Forum on "Managment problems of Streams and Stream frontages" in 1976; This also focussed on recovery methods such as fencing off streams and restoring native vegetation. The Conservation Council of Victoria produced a "River Improvement Awareness" publication in 1977, noting that 40 years earlier the problem

uppermost in people's minds was the choking of streams by willows and the diversion of water onto private properties.

Then there was a symposium on Stream Protection in 1985 preceded by the "State of the Rivers" report in 1983 which emphasised the importance of fencing out stock from river frontages, excepting occasional watering points. In 1980 "Keeping our Rivers Fit for Man" was the title of a Water Research Foundation symposium and the "Future for Victorian Rivers" came out in 1984 from the same source.

From early days of settlement the belief of landowners that they should be able to use river frontages adjoining their property as they saw fit became entrenched. Wholesale licensing to allow the grazing of river frontages soon followed. Now 70% of Victoria's inland frontages are part of the farm for grazing or cropping. This makes rehabilitation of water frontages difficult, but not impossible when it has the farmers' support.

Grazing pressures over many years has effectively prevented natural regeneration of River Red Gums and associated understory. Removing willow and blackberry infestation, clearing snags, stabilising eroding banks, revegetating the riparian zone and fencing out stock are part of the necessary restoration works. Siltation, turbidity, nutrients, and pesticides from agricultural run-off too often indicate a low level of awareness and an even lower level of concern. This has to change if our streams are to survive.

Then there is the need to ensure an adequate environmental stream flow to maintain a healthy and æsthetic aquatic ecosystem. 42% of the mean annual flow of the Campaspe River is diverted to land use, which must affect the life of the river and others like it.

To echo the 1996 Shire Commissioners' Action Plan - to do something about rehabilitation of degraded streams throughout the Shire calls for a whole-of-catchment approach with short term visible gains as well as long term goals.

Chris Morris.

Rescue by Cloning

A friend in W.A. sent me an article which had appeared in the Western Power news sheet telling of a program to rescue the rare Cinnamon Sun Orchid, the perfume of which pervades the air with "an aroma of freshly baked cinnamon buns"!

The golden orchid comes from the hillsides at Gidgegannup, and only flowers for two weeks every year, and its existance is linked to a special

fungus growing near it. It was feared to be extinct until a local conservationist found a clump on the roadside in the late 1980s, and then some more plants on a hillside in the nearby bush.

At first it was protected by wire surrounds, etc., but now the King's Park Botanic Gardens have been experimenting with cryostorage, tissue culture and plant hormones to propogate new plants. "DNA fingerprinting will be eventually used to establish plant or plant differences - vital when restoring an endangered species."

The Kings Park Laboratory is one of only three in the world which uses cryostorage, which allows delicate plant cells to be stored indefinitely at -198°C. while scientists work on ways to rescue vulnerable species.

One of the scientists involved is Melbournian, Andrew Batty, who is being funded by Western Power.

Eventually it is hoped to return plants to the wild, and it is envisaged that the technique will be used to rescue other endangered flora.

Rita Mills, from an article by
Ingrid Jacobson in the
Western Power Newsletter.

NEW MEMBERS - Welcome to the club ZOe Thomas, Dianne and Zoe Thorson, and John Sinnott.

Observations

* Margaret Badminton reports that the Rose Robin has returned to her home at Yapeen this year, a deeper rose colour than last year, but the resident Scarlet Robin tries to drive it out of its territory.
* She also writes, "In the beautiful golden evening light we've been having recently there has been a feeding frenzy at 4.30pm in the garden, including ♂ and ♀ Golden Whistler, ♂ and ♀ Scarlet Robin, 2 Eastern Spinebills, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Brown, Yellow-rumped and Yellow Thornbills, Superb Blue Wrens, Jacky Winter and a flock of Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters."
* Natalie de Maccus had four Rainbow Lorrikeets feeding in a Banksia integrifolia in the garden of her home in the Melbourne bayside suburb of Hampton. One of the smaller species of lorrikeet visits in abundance, but she had not seen the Rainbow Lorikeets previously.
* A young ♀ Wood Duck was found killed on the road between Chewton and Expedition Pass. The head injuries suggested that it flew into a passing vehicle. A couple of Tall Greenhoods are in bud at Expedition

Pass in the bush beyond the overflow. Shirley Parnaby.
* Shirley also noted that some spraying had been done at Expedition Pass along the wall of the dam, and is seems to have killed everything but the Gorse, which is flourishing!
* Anyone going to Sunbury by the new road (the turn-off just before the first flyover on the new freeway) look out for the cutting through the old volcanic cone, a mixture of red scoria and dense basalt. Its worth a stop just to look at it closely, but the roadside does have very sticky mud if it has been raining. Rita Mills.

Excursion to Nuggetty

The excursion will be to the Peach Heath enclosure on Nuggetty, and to the uncommon Flat-leaf Bush-pea, growing on Mt Moorul. Take stout shoes. Some of the route for cars is along narrow hilly tracks.

Castlemaine Plant List

Edition 10.0 is now available. Edition 10 has an additional column. This column gives information about rare and endangered native species and the weed classification of introduced species. Cost is still $3.00

The Spring Get-together.

A booking sheet for members of CFNC members is included as an insert in this newsletter. Bookings for meals are required by the Friday 28 August 1998. Non-members should use a different booking sheet. Both sheets can be obtained from E Perkins.

Calder Highway Planning.

Copies of the Kyneton to Faraday and Faraday to Ravenswood information bulletin no 2 has been received. It has information about the under investigation.

The China Daily.

The Club has ben given a copy of this Newspaper, dated May 21, with an article *Bird Sanctuary needs further protection.* The copy can be obtained from E Perkins.

Nuggetty Enclosure Plant List

Acacia paradoxa Hedge wattle
Acrtotriche serrulata Honey-pots
Athropodium strictum Chocolate Lily
Astroloma humifusum Cranberry Heath
Bulbine bulbosa Bulbine Lily
Bursaria spinosa Sweet Bursaria
Cassinia arcuata Coffee Bush
Cheilanthes austrotenuifolia Green Rock-fern
Danthonia linkii Link's Wallaby-grass
Daviesia ulicifolia Gorse Bitter-pea
Drosera macrantha Climbing Sundew
Thysanotus pattersonii Climbing Fringe Lily
Drosera whittakeri Scented Sundew
Eucalyptus goniocalyx Long-leaf Box
Hardenbergia violacea Purple Coral-pea
Hydrocotyle laxiflora Bush Pennies
Joycea pallida Red-anther Wallaby Grass
Leptorhynchos tenuifolia *Wiry Buttons*
Melichrus urceolatus Urn Heath
Lomandra sp Mat-rush
Pimelea linifolia Slender Rice-flower
Poa sieberiana Grey Tussock-grass
Senecio tenuiflorus Purple-leaf Groundsel

EP

C.F.N.C. PROGRAMME

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January. Entrances to the car parks are beside the Art Gallery and beside the Church building in Lyttleton Street.

Excursions leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days.

Business Meetings are held at 38 Campbell Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

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Fri July 10 **Walking in the Newstead area** Speaker is Ron Sneps who has been conducting these walks. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat July 11 **Nuggety Range, looking for Peach Heath.** Leave 13 Mostyn St at 1.30pm. Leader is E. Perkins

Fri Aug. 14 **Volcanos.** Speaker is Dr Julian Hollis. 8pm UCA hall.

Sat Aug 15 **Trentham, to the Geology Museum.** Leave 13 Mostyn St at 1.30pm.

Sat, Sun, Aug 8 and 9 **Swift Parrot Survey** Details to be announced.

Fri 11 to Sun. 13 Sept. **Field Naturalists Get-together at Castlemaine.** See insert for details and registration form.

Thur 24 Sept. **Broom Pull** at the Butterfly area of the Botanical Gardens, Froomes Rd. Start 9 am. Bring gardening gloves, something to kneel on, a friend or two, snacks and drinks. Finish about 2.30 - 3.00pm. A free barbecue to follow.

Fri. 16 to Sun 18 Oct. **V.F.N.C.A. Campout at Warnambool.** For details see CN #244 p7.

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Committee; G. Broadway (Pres.), M. Dredge (V.P.), B. Maund (Sec.), M. Badminton (Treas.), R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), John Turnbull, M. Oliver, C. Morris, K. Turner, E. Perkins.

Subscriptions - Ordinary membership: Single $16, Family $24
Pensioner/student: Single $12, Family $18 Supporting : $25
Newsletter posted: Membership + $6

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GDT PUBLIC WALK: Sun July 26, St Georges Lake (Creswick) to Ballarat R.S. Leave at 9.30am. Degree of difficulty, medium, 7-8 hours duration. Suitable clothing and footwear, and food and drinks for the day essential. It is also essential to register at least 4 days beforehand. Ph. Pat Hope on 5341 3711.

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Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.
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